Washington Merry-go-round

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By Jack Anderson & Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — Congress has called for military equipment, including planes, radar, sensors and satellites, to bolster the faltering battle against drug abuse.

This unusual request has been forwarded to the Pentagon by the Senate Permanent Investigations subcommittee. In a private letter to Defense Secretary Harold Brown, the senators pleaded:

"This country is fighting a self-proclaimed war on drugs. When fighting a war, you use the best resources available and make every effort to win. This is not being done."

The letter, signed by Sens. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., and Charles Percy, R.-Ill., contends that drug abuse costs the United States a staggering $17 billion annually. More than 5,000 Americans die each year from the improper use of drugs; thousands more are killed and injured in drug-related crimes.

The sheer magnitude of the drug problem has led the subcommittee to seek drastic countermeasures.

"Within the federal government," declare the senators, "the Department of Defense alone possess the air and land vehicles needed to pursue and overtake the drug traffickers."

They point out that the Customs Service "lacks sufficient planes, radar, sensors and other equipment to adequately protect our borders; the equipment it does have largely consists of second generation or ill-equipped models."

To curb the deadly drug traffic, the senators insist, will take "resources comparable to sophistication to those used by the smugglers themselves."

Footnote: A spokesman said the Pentagon has received the proposal and is preparing a response to it.

LETELIER MYSTERY: Cuban officials have tipped off visiting Americans that the Cuban terrorist, Orlando Bosch, is the man behind the dynamite death of Chilean exile leader Orlando Letelier in Washington last September.

This conclusion is based upon Fidel Castro's own investigation of the assassination. His agents reported that the Chilean military junta enlisted Bosch to bankroll the plot. He was chosen, according to the Cubans, because he was fanatical and honest enough not to steal the murder money.

He allegedly parceled out the money to other anti-Communist Cubans who actually blew up Letelier and a companion as they were driving down Washington's tree-shaded embassy row.

Last August, we revealed that this same Orlando Bosch was involved in a plot to assassinate former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Costa Rica. Bosch slipped into Costa Rica on a false passport, ready to gun down Kissinger, but was clapped into jail four days before the visiting secretary arrived in the country.

Bosch is not in a Venezuelan jail on suspicion of bombing a Cuban airliner. This caused the deaths of 73 Cubans, some reportedly Castro secret agents.

Meanwhile, we have learned from U.S. intelligence sources that another figure in the Letelier case, Robert Carballo, may be in danger of assassination himself.

He is head of the veterans of the Bay of Pigs 2506 Brigade. His predecessor, Juan Jose Peruyero, was shot to death in Miami last January. It has been whispered that he was assassinated because he was preparing to talk to the FBI about the Letelier case.

Carballo has been asked point blank by federal investigators whether he was involved in the Letelier bombing. He has denied it flatly. But there is concern, nevertheless, that he may be a marked man.

Footnote: Cuban foreign ministry sources passed on the information about Bosch to American visitors. There is always the possibility, of course, that the information may be fabricated to embarrass the Chilean dictatorship.

HEADLINES AND FOOTNOTES: Saudi Arabian sources have made the startling suggestion, in the strictest of privacy, that the Arab oil states may be willing to provide financial aid to Israel if the Middle East conflict is settled. The Saudis pointed out that the Israelis and the Arab moderates have a common interest in keeping the Communists out of the Middle East.

— President Carter's proposal to jack up federal gasoline taxes has got gas station owners worried. They will be expected to collect the extra taxes, which will mean having more cash on hand. They fear this will be an open invitation to armed robbery.

—Our column about Texaco illegally diverting huge amounts of natural gas for its own refineries has brought a torrent of reaction. The company fired off a three-foot-long telegram to our office denying the allegations. But many of Texaco's own employees and stockholders have angrily called top company officials and questioned their honesty. In a fit of indignity, some loyal motorists even sent back their Texaco credit cards.